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ABSTRACT

Technological and demographic changes affect the nation's employment landscape. The most consistent trend of the century has been the shrinking workweek. By the year 2000, many workers will spend only 32 hours per week at work. Other workplace changes will continue the quest for more work satisfaction: technical trends (flextime/telecommuting); automation; leasing employees; compensation (flexible benefit plans or "cafeteria" benefits); the changing work force and its impact on the workplace; work force incentives (benefits); and skills for the work force. Past trends can be used as the foundation for predicting the future: (1) people will be the most important resource for organizations; (2) required knowledge and skills will change in response to technology and economy; (3) "good" attitudes will be important; (4) employees demonstrating the "right stuff" will be in demand; (5) managers will adopt and apply new leadership skills; (6) employees will accept more responsibility; (7) corporate structures will evolve with technological changes; and (8) a company's reputation will affect recruitment of workers. (14 references) (NLA)

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THE FUTURE AT WORK

An Assessment of Changing Workplace Trends

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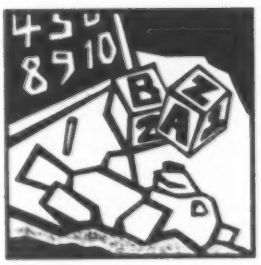

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The Future At Work: An Assessment of Changing Workplace Trends

PREFACE

The mission of the Interstate Conference of Employment Security Agencies (ICESA) is to serve both as an advocate for employment security policies and systems, and as a support system for administrators and the State agencies of the Employment Security System. This publication is one in a continuing series of products designed to accomplish that mission.

This report presents some of the workplace changes that have been occurring over the past several years and are projected to continue into the next century. It is intended as a followup report to last year's "Workforce Trends" report which presented an overall assessment of future workforce trends to the year 2000. Like the previous report, this report will help serve as a basis for understanding the forces affecting labor supply and demand over this decade.

The nation's employment landscape in the 1990's will see some drastic changes in technology and demographics. In this decade, manufacturing will represent a smaller share of the economy, the workforce will age, service industries will require higher skill levels, and minority workers will be the largest share of the increase in the workforce.

The U.S. will be required to make long-term investments in technology and education in order to increase the competitiveness of the economy and thus contend with growing international competition. Labor market information will be needed for the development and application of new ideas necessary in addressing these changes to the economic infrastructure. Providing technical and economic information to policymakers will allow new ideas to be fully implemented and the challenges of the future to be met.

Labor market information (LMI) is a major product and function of all State Employment Security Agencies (SESAs). The rich data base created by the operation of the Employment Security programs places the state agencies in a unique position, with ready access to a variety of labor market information that is important at national, regional, state, and local levels.

Employment and unemployment, training and retraining, education and literacy, welfare and welfare reforms, and economic development are among the areas in which labor market information can contribute to policy formulation. Labor market information serves a broad array of users, including the business community, general public, educators, media and government.

Federal-state labor market information programs are administered by the State Employment Security Agencies in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration, and Bureau of Labor Statistics. State labor market information departments also work with State Occupational Information Coordinating Committees in promoting LMI for various uses such as career counseling and human resources planning.

Labor market information portrays the economic picture of a geographic area. It includes information on jobs, workers, and the dynamics of the workforce. Obtained from employer surveys, administrative records and other sources, LMI provides information about the historical, current, and future state of the economy. Labor market information departments also provide analysis of data for planning, administering, and evaluating various employment and training programs.

For further information about ICESA or this publication, please contact Emily DeRocco, Executive Director, or Gary Crossley, Labor Market Information Director for ICESA, at (202) 628-5588.

INTRODUCTION

During this century, one of the most consistent trends has been the shrinking workweek. A generation ago, most Americans worked a forty-hour week; today many workers still work a regular forty-hour week but many more now are employed part-time. As a result, the average workweek has contracted to slightly more than thirty-five hours and it is still shrinking. If this trend continues, by the year 2000, many workers will spend only 32 hours per week at work, a full day less than their parents did.

This and other workplace changes – in the work environment, in methods of work, in benefits, and in attitudes toward work – will bring about a change which will continue a quest for a more satisfying life for American workers in the years ahead.

TECHNICAL TRENDS

Flextime/Telecommuting

As the workweek continues to shrink, it will change in other ways as well. There are many employers who have changed or are experimenting with alternative work schedules. For many American workers, gone is the traditional workweek of five equal days spent at the office or factory.

Instead, "flextime," which allows workers to set their own starting and quitting times of the workday, as long as the required work hours are met and the work gets done, is being established in the workplace. Flextime helps people who are early risers, late risers, and people with other responsibilities. Some employers are even allowing workers who are "night people" to start work at noon and work into the night.

Workers on the same project may not even see one another and communicate by leaving messages on one another's desks or in computer-based electronic mail centers which can be accessed by telephone. About 12 percent of all full-time employees use flextime work schedules in the United States.

Another concept related to flextime is called "flexplace" or "telecommuting." This allows workers to not only select their own hours of work, but also their work locations. At times, they need not show up at the company's main work site. Instead, they may work at home, or sometimes in a local branch office, or an area designated by the employer.

By 2000, approximately 22 percent of the workforce may be "telecommuting" from home workstations linked to main offices via computer terminals. The telecommuters will be joined by other small entrepreneurs and free-lance or contract workers working from a home office.

About 15 million people will list a home address as their principal place of business. These are people whose burning desire to leave the confines of the traditional office setting is fueled by several factors.

With the advent of new technology, such as user-friendly personal computers, fax machines, copiers, and modems, a home office can be equipped for under $10,000. The scarcity and high cost of office space present a situation that can be especially daunting for the self-employed entrepreneur.

Telecommuters also indicate that they can get more work done at home because of fewer distractions and therefore can concentrate better on their work. Since they are much more productive at home, some telecommuters indicate that their earning power has also increased substantially. They also benefit from more control over their work, more flexible scheduling of their personal lives, improved communications both in their private lives and in their jobs, and savings on food, clothing, and transportation.

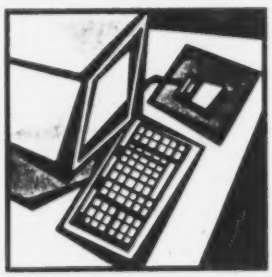
For many American workers, gone is the traditional workweek of five equal days spent at the office or factory.

INTRODUCTION

TECHNICAL TRENDS

The key word for employers will be "flexibility" as they scramble for skilled workers at the turn of the century.

AUTOMATION



Business also benefits and not only because telecommuters need little in the way of expensive office space. Companies enjoy more staffing flexibility because they can recruit qualified people who may live too far from the office to commute, but may still telecommute.

As employers offer workers alternatives of flextime and flexplace, they create an environment of individual responsibility, initiative, and accountability. When employers act on the principle of paying workers for getting the job done and not for putting in time, they find large gains in productivity, lower costs, and improvement in operations. As employers trust their workers with more control over their working hours, companies are discovering renewed organizational flexibility and responsiveness – key ingredients in today's competitive economy.

Telecommuting also offers a solution to one of society's major problems: it may help to alleviate traffic gridlock which many commuters face daily. It is estimated that billions of dollars are wasted each year in stop-and-go freeway traffic. The slow moving traffic also spews out tons of pollution into the air each day. Legislators are seeking alternatives which include telecommuting as a better solution to adding more highways.

More than 25 million people now work at home on a full- or part-time basis. This figure is expected to grow considerably in the 21st century.

Other options also are beginning to gain popularity. These include "job sharing" in which two or more persons share a job which normally would employ only one; compressed workweeks in which people work only four days a week instead of five days of normal length; sabbatical leave for workers; an opportunity to trade portions of a worker's salary for more vacation time; and the growth of part-time jobs that still provide career opportunities.

Social pressure for more individual choice in balancing work and leisure is growing rapidly. Traditional work schedules cause problems for nearly one-third of all workers and over the next two decades such policies as flextime, flexplace, and job sharing will become standard practice at many companies. The key word for employers will be "flexibility" as they scramble for skilled workers at the turn of the century.

AUTOMATION

What has made the changes in the workplace possible is the continuing evolution of the economy from its early founding roots in agriculture and manufacturing to the present and future world of computer-based services.

In an economy built on agriculture and manufacturing, it would have been next to impossible for the arguments for flexibility to occur, as these industries offered few opportunities to adapt to individual wishes. Unlike these two industries, flexibility comes easier to the service industries, which will employ 88 percent of the labor force by the year 2000. Business and finance, legal services, and the retail trade are all based on information flow, as well as personal services such as health care, hotels, and restaurants which have large information based components. Even in manufacturing, large-scale automation efforts have replaced many of the manual activities with computer programming and other information-based skills. To a large extent, information can be processed when and where people find it most convenient.

The evolution from the Industrial Age to the Information Age applies to most office jobs in all industries. Management and support functions are based on information. By 2000, digitized voice recognition and voice synthesis systems will provide decision makers with artificial intelligence and expert systems. These computer programs will help to compile reports and statistical data

independently. And when these devices become commonplace, they will also be capable of understanding and doing our bidding by listening to words and not by interpreting typed commands.

Office productivity will increase tremendously as these new machines are adopted and workers will get their work done in less time. This growth in production will help employers to shorten the workweek. Many of the secretaries and stenographers will trade in their old skills and learn new skills in managing the sophisticated equipment that does the actual work of managing information. And these jobs, unlike the traditional ones they replace, will offer shorter hours of work and flexible working conditions.

In a world interwoven with optical fibers and other data links, it makes little or less difference where the data or information originates and where it is processed. People need not be next to one another to work on an information-based product that can flash around the world in just a few seconds. This means that workers need not be next to their bosses. They could be in the next room or in another state or country.

LEASING EMPLOYEES

An ever increasing number of employers are enjoying the benefits of motivated, productive workers, without the problems of personnel administration. These businesses are staffing their companies with workers from employee-leasing firms.

Unlike temporary agencies, which usually place people in short-term jobs in various companies, employee-leasing companies generally provide permanent workers for their clients, process paychecks, attend to personnel matters, ensure compliance with workplace regulations, and provide some employee benefits. In some instances, small businesses have turned a work force obtained through traditional hiring methods over to a leasing company and then signed a contract to lease back the workers. Under such arrangements, a company's total expenses for payroll, taxes, personnel, administration, and benefits remain about the same, but its paperwork burden is substantially reduced, and its workers' benefits are greatly enhanced.

The leasing company is usually the company of record, but sometimes the client is the employer, with the leasing company assuming responsibility for some of the personnel matters and administrative paperwork.

About one million people are now estimated to be working in large and small businesses through leasing companies in America.

Employee leasing is an industry still in its infancy stage. In spite of its success the industry is experiencing growing pains. There is still some confusion as to the precise relationship between leasing companies and their clients as well as problems between the employee-leasing industry and insurance companies over workers' compensation rates.

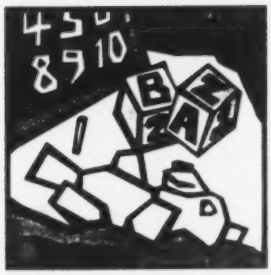
Another concern is the legal relationship between client and company. There is a question as to whether or not the leasing company is the sole legal employer of those who work for the client, or is it a co-employer? And can the client insulate itself from labor and employment laws? Or who is responsible if an employee files a discrimination suit? These and other concerns remain to be resolved in the courts. Because the industry is still taking shape and industry standards are not mandatory, businesses are moving cautiously in this area.

About one million people are now estimated to be working in large and small businesses through leasing companies in America.

LEASING EMPLOYEES

Child care and elder care programs will help workers minimize their work and home-related conflicts.

COMPENSATION



COMPENSATION

Flexible Benefit Plans or "Cafeteria" Benefits

As workers shed the fixed office and the fixed rigid work schedule, they will shed some of the other ties that traditionally have bound them to their jobs. Workers of the future will not have to qualify for benefits again when they change employers. They will carry their own health insurance, retirement plan, and other benefits with them whenever they change jobs. Each worker could have an agreement that will specify how much of the employee's fringe-benefit package the employer will pay as part of the overall compensation.

In the new era of flexible benefits, there is a program where the combination of worker choice and tax breaks is reshaping the delivery of company benefit plans and helping to control benefit costs. This technique, reimbursement accounts, is one of several flexible benefits approaches that can be used on an individual basis or in combination.

Reimbursement accounts are quite appealing because of the tax breaks they offer. For every $1,000 put into an account rather than the employee's paycheck, an employee in the 28 percent federal tax bracket saves $280. In some states the employees also save an additional amount on state taxes, which vary from 5 to 7 percent. Additionally, the employer and employee both save 7.65 percent per $1,000 on Social Security taxes. Reimbursement accounts also create a mechanism for shifting a larger share of rising health-care costs to employees, but on a tax-favored basis that helps cushion the impact on the workers.

Although tax incentives help drive reimbursement accounts, choice itself is the dominant factor of yet another type of flexible benefits plan—the cafeteria plan. As trends move toward individually held, fully portable benefits, companies will increasingly offer a "cafeteria" of benefits from which employees can choose according to their individual needs. It may be possible that a working couple would split their fringe benefits to ensure that all their needs are covered, or an employee who is already covered by a spouse's medical and dental benefits, may select life and accident insurance, extra vacation, legal services, child care, or parental leave.

Cafeteria plans were once the exclusive domain of large companies, but they are available at smaller companies as well. The barriers to the "flex" concept were too large for small employers. Start-up and administrative costs made flex too expensive. Insurance companies showed little interest in developing products for small business. Also, small companies lacked staff resources to pursue information about flex programs. Small companies are now overcoming those barriers and benefit program experts predict a boom of flex plans among small companies in the 1990s. Some experts think that it will be rare for employers not to have flex plans by the turn of the century.

Employers are also beginning to tailor their benefits to fit the needs of growing numbers of parents with school age children. Child care is one of the problems facing parents today. To fill this need, companies are offering a variety of child care benefits. Child care and elder care programs will help workers minimize their work and home-related conflicts, and help balance their dual responsibilities. Some employers have established child care centers at or near the workplace. This allows the parents to spend time with their children during the work breaks and alleviates parental stress.

On-site child care centers for infants give new mothers an incentive to return to their jobs sooner. About 5 percent of employees receive some type of employer-subsidized child care. This includes employer-subsidized facilities and reimbursement to employees for the cost of caring for a child

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in a nursery, day care center, or by a babysitter on or off the employer's premises.

Other benefits include daycare at the office or factory for workers' children and even eldercare. Employers have found that "eldercare" affects workers' productivity, absenteeism, turnover and morale. Some companies have established flexible policies to reduce turnover and to enable valued employees to build a strong home life.

Only a few companies offer parental leave. Paid maternity leave is available to only 3 percent of the workers, while paternity leave is available to only one percent of the workers. Unpaid maternity leave is offered to 17 percent of employees. The number of days off vary with each company. Among larger companies, employees may also receive leave for child adoption.

It is estimated that approximately 13 percent of all employees participate in cafeteria plans, a rate that has doubled in the last several years. It is anticipated that benefits will grow even more lavish as the supply of skilled wokers diminishes and employers struggle to retain highly skilled employees.

Some employers are now offering wellness programs which include exercise, physical fitness, weight control, stop-smoking, and stress management. Such programs range from exercise and nutritional counseling to simple blood pressure checks. Some employers provide fitness centers including swimming pools, jogging tracks, stationary bicycles, and weight training equipment.

WORKFORCE AT THE WORKPLACE

The Changing Workforce and its Impact on the Workplace

This transformation of traditional jobs to custom-tailored employment stems from the inevitable technological, demographic, and philosophical changes that will be prevalent as the United States enters the next century. Much of this is attributed to the "Baby Boom" generation, not by virtue of what they did, but what they did not. They did not have many children. So there will be more work than people to do the work as we approach the close of this century. Employers will be eager to offer potential workers whatever it takes to sign them on and keep them on the job.

The authors of Workforce 2000 predict that employers will suffer from an "unprecedented shortage of workers" with far more jobs available than there will be people to fill them. In the coming years, the U.S. population will grow more slowly than in the past, but at the same time, 21 million jobs will be added between 1986-2000, an 18 percent growth in the labor market. While the number of young workers will decline, the proportion of minority youth in the labor force will increase – most markedly among non-English speaking and black workers. This opens a window of opportunity for groups who traditionally have not been in the mainstream of the labor market, but also represents a growth in the less-educated segment of the population.

In 1959, only 37 percent of women worked outside the home as compared with nearly 57 percent in 1989. This social and economic change has been one of the most significant changes of the last 30 years. In the past two decades, many women worked out of necessity, but more and more have found themselves climbing the corporate ladder. Today, and in the future, the question will not be whether women will

Employers will be eager to offer potential workers whatever it takes to sign them on and keep them on the job.

A major change in the workplace and workforce will occur as parts of the Americans with Disabilities Act become effective.

INCENTIVES

have a career, but what it will be. Between 1985 and 2000, employers will be hiring more women because about 63 percent of all new jobseekers will be women. Secretary of Labor Lynn Martin has established initiatives to address the "glass ceiling" issue in order to allow more women to move up to the top of the corporate ladder.

Furthermore, our population is aging. Over 75 percent of the workforce for the year 2000 is already working. This translates to a problem that workers with critical technical skills will be retiring at an increasingly rapid rate, leaving the workplace void of their skills, experience and expertise.

In the coming years, more immigrants will be working in the United States than at any time in the last 70 years. Immigrants must overcome barriers such as language, culture, and education. Some immigrants already have good job skills, but they haven't had the opportunity to obtain good jobs due to language difficulties. Other immigrants must gain basic job skills in order to enter the mainstream of the American workforce. Affirmative action programs will also help provide some job opportunities to ethnic minorities, and for immigrant or refugee groups who may not be in the labor market.

Disabled people are among the nation's most educated population group. Yet only 37 percent of America's 13 million disabled citizens of working age are working full- or part-time. Most workplace barriers can be easily accommodated with little or no expense to the employer. Contrary to myths, numerous surveys reveal that disabled workers have excellent work habits (often better than non-disabled workers), have safety and productivity records that are as good or better than non-disabled workers, and they are long-term employees.

Ironically, most disabled workers have been refused for so many jobs that they are discouraged from job seeking. Disabled workers can be recruited from rehabilitation agencies, state Employment Service offices, and schools. A major change in the workplace and workforce will occur as parts of the Americans with Disabilities Act become effective. This Act makes major changes in employment access, public accommodations, delivery of state/local services, and transportation/telecommunication services.

Not all retired workers want to live out the remainder of their lives in retirement. After a couple of leisure years, many become bored. Retired workers are excellent candidates for part-time jobs. Only one-third of all senior citizens age 55 and older are working. Some companies have special programs which actively recruit senior citizens for part-time jobs. Only four percent of employers offer incentives for older workers to delay retirement. Many older workers would like to continue working under the right circumstances. They are willing to postpone retirement, switch to part-time jobs, or continue in less stressful jobs.

Another issue is the declining quality of the workforce as more and more workers lack basic skills needed in the workplace. This will add problems to the recruiting and retention woes already faced by employers. According to U.S. Secretary of Labor Lynn Martin's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, students will need to focus on skills for tomorrow's workplace. Such skills and competencies as managing a budget, teamwork, literacy, understanding manuals, using calculators, working cash registers, and evaluating data will be needed in the workplace.

WORKFORCE INCENTIVES

As workforce demographics change, and employers encounter difficulty in recruiting and retaining good workers, employers will need to increase and improve the scope of benefits. To accomplish this, employers have been offering more generous benefits and

benefit packages. In past years, benefit programs were often limited to health care, life insurance, retirement, vacations, holidays, and sick leave. Traditionally, employer benefits provide economic security for workers and their families, and show they care about their employees' welfare. For example, health care plans ease the cost of medical expenses, disability benefits provide income to workers who can no longer work, retirement plans allow workers to maintain a decent living standard, and life insurance benefits help families financially when the breadwinner dies. Vacations, holidays, sick leave, and rest breaks are a way of caring about employee welfare and maintaning good employee relationships.

New benefit programs now include parental leave, childcare, elder care, flexible work schedules, wellness programs, and flexible (cafeteria) benefits plans. These new programs indicate the employers' responsiveness to the needs of employees.

As workers decide which company to work for, employees look at wages and benefits, among other factors. In many cases, the critical difference for many workers and their families, is attractive benefit programs. The key to success in finding and keeping good workers is providing good benefits.

The U.S. Department of Labor points out, "Benefits are today standard components of the compensation package, and workers generally have come to expect them."

To attract and keep good people, employers must have something to offer. More and more workers are asking the all-important question of "what's in it for me?" If they don't see the positive aspects of working for an employer on a short-term or long-term basis, then employers should not expect to keep those workers.

Employers are increasing their benefit options, as well as designing their benefits to fit the needs of the changing workforce, which includes two-paycheck families and more working women. Despite the advance of new and more responsive benefits, employers are slow to change, and have not updated their benefit packages.

Employers should treat their workers as if they are the most important asset to the business. When qualified workers become more scarce, employer attitudes and benefit programs must change.

What can or should employers do? Employers should review their personnel policies and benefit programs, take a long-term and short-term look at their workforce needs, and examine measures of labor market supply and demand such as local or state unemployment rates. Competitive or better wages and, in the context of the economic environment, benefits which will attract workers to their company should be analyzed. A successful employment plan will attract qualified new workers and retain career-minded employees for the long term.

It makes good business sense for employers to offer good benefits to employees. Benefits give workers a stake in the workplace, a greater feeling of security and stability — emotionally and financially. Employers hope that benefit programs improve workers' productivity and morale, and help to reduce absenteeism, tardiness, and turnover.

At the same time that the trend toward benefit flexibility continues, it should also be recognized that the cost of employee compensation is increasing. Benefits accounted for 17 percent of the total cost of employer compensation to workers in 1966 and nearly 30 percent by 1989. The Bureau of Labor Statistics' 1990 survey reflects the following breakdown of employee benefits covering firms with under 100 employees, both full and part-time, as compared with employers with over 100 workers, as shown at the top of the next page.

A successful employment plan will attract qualified new workers and retain career-minded employees for the long term.

Several initiatives are underway to address the skills and quality of the American workforce.

SKILLS

BENEFITS	Firms with under 100 workers		Over 100 workers
	full-time	part-time	full-time
Paid holiday	83%	28%	97%
Paid vacation	88%	29%	97%
Unpaid maternity leave	17%	4%	37%
Medical care	69%	6%	92%
Life insurance	64%	6%	93%
Retirement plan	42%	10%	81%

SKILLS FOR THE WORKFORCE

There have been many efforts over the last few years to address America's workforce needs for the future workplace. Workforce 2000 brought to the public policy forefront the issues of the nation's competitive capability. The capacity of the current and prospective workforce was questioned in terms of employer skill needs versus worker abilities.

The following list summarizes several initiatives underway to address the skills and quality of the American workforce:

Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS)

Established in February 1990, by former Secretary of Labor Elizabeth Dole, the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills had a charge to identify generic workplace abilities that all high school graduates need if they expect meaningful employment. The commission delineated those skills, recommending assessment tools, and proposing attainment levels.

The Honorable William Brock serves as chair of the commission, which is composed of 30 distinguished leaders – 13 from business, 6 from labor, and 11 from state government and education. The commission is scheduled to issue a final report in early 1992.

Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce

This commission is chaired by Ira Magaziner and co-chaired by William Brock and Ray Marshall. Thirty-one key business, labor, and government individuals are on the commission.

Their first report titled, *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages*, was issued in June 1990 and contained several recommendations to address the skills problem.

Advisory Commission on Work-Based Learning

This sixteen-member commission provides advice and assistance to the Department of Labor's Office of Work-Based Learning. Advisory members include representatives of business, labor, education, and other interest groups.

Workplace Readiness: Education for Employment

The Agency for Instructional Technology (AIT) and a consortium of state and provincial education agencies are developing Workplace Readiness, a multi-media instructional resource that will help learners deal with the changing circumstances of the workplace. The purpose of the project is to contribute substantially to education for employment.

The project, providing a comprehensive curriculum and supporting instructional materials, is aimed primarily at high school vocational programs (10th-12th graders), but it may also be useful in other settings. The product should be ready for the 1991-1992 school year.

AMERICA 2000: An Education Strategy

In April 1991, President Bush released America 2000: An Education Strategy.

This is a bold, complex, and long-range plan to move every community in America toward the national education goals adopted by the president and governors in 1990. This source book is a collection of documents that offers a comprehensive description of national education goals. The Department of Education hosted an assembly of "state teams" in July 1991 in a multi-agency approach to achieving these goals.

Center for Workforce Preparation and Quality Education

In the spring of 1990, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce established the Center for Workforce Preparation and Quality Education. The purpose of the Center is to mobilize a national grassroots education reform campaign, utilizing the Chamber's 2,700 members. The Center will stress action and provide resources via a clearinghouse approach. The Center includes four professional staff and support assistants who manage education, employment and training, immigration, and workforce issues.

Put Quality to Work: Train America's Workforce

This special report from the American Society for Training and Development addresses the need to prepare the nation's workforce to meet the world's new competitive standards. *Put Quality to Work: Train America's Workforce* takes the position that the country's business organizations can leverage an investment in training into a competitive advantage. The report also looks at the "new economy" from the point of view of people at work, by examining the impact of changing standards as well as emerging organizational structures on knowledge and skill requirements in the American workforce.

CONCLUSION:

A Perspective on the Future

Some people say it is impossible to predict the future. Others may argue that the past is prologue. Historians caution that those who do not study the past are doomed to repeat it. Economists tell us that everything moves in cycles. Seers say that the future is now and futurists talk in terms of trends.

While we cannot really predict the future with certainty, we can look at past trends and use them as the foundation for making certain assumptions as to the fate that awaits us.

People will continue to be the most important resource for practically every kind of organization that produces goods and services. Some jobs will remain pretty much the same as in the past, but others will change dramatically with the advent of new technology in the workplace.

Knowlege and skills required of workers of the future will change in response to both technology and the need to produce more with leaner resources. The future workforce will be called upon to keep the machinery of the economy moving. This will present frustrating challenges to business as they compete for people that must be trained in order to do the work asked of them. Companies will be asked to train workers who lack the basic literacy skills in order to bridge the gap in worker availability. They will have to "grow" their own "good people."

Attitudes will be important in the workplace. Attitudes will mean the differences between "good" workers and "marginal" workers. Employers will have to offer attitude training in an effort to help their marginal workers become the kind of workers they will need to meet increasing competitive challenges.

Those employees who demonstrate the "right stuff" will be highly successful and will enjoy highly rewarding and satisfying careers. The demand for such people will assure them of fulfillment in their chosen endeavors.

Managers will adopt and apply new leadership skills in the workplace. The old traditional hard-line management style, the

People will continue to be the most important resource for practically every kind of organization that produces goods and services.

These employers with a vision and dedicated leadership will enjoy being on the leading edge... the competitive edge.

autocratic approach, will not work in tomorrow's work environment. The participative management concept will be predominant in the workplace of the future.

Few people in management today know how to be good leaders. A whole new set of skills must be learned and practiced to enable people and organizations to excel. Organizations will provide remedial skill improvement training and development, focusing on helping management to understand how to work more effectively with people.

To get the work done, people will be expected to accept more responsibility. Accountability, along with more authority, will filter down from the top management levels to the line workers.

New corporate structures will evolve as middle managers are replaced by computers and other new technological devices. More of these people will become specialists in support of their fellow team members. Workers of the future will have more freedom in determining how their work will be acomplished.

Some employers will have their pick of workers while others will struggle to find good people. The difference will be the company's reputation on how people work together, opportunities to make a difference, corporate responsibility to employees and to society, meaningful work with growth potential, and intrinsic and extrinsic rewards.

The changes will be comfortable for some organizations and painful for others. Some employers have already done their homework and are well on their way to making the necessary changes. Some companies will not change, but these inflexible companies will eventually disappear.

The 1990s and beyond will be exciting times. The employers who attract and keep their quality workforce will become magnets and attract even more highly qualified workers. These employers with a vision and dedicated leadership will enjoy being on the leading edge... the competitive edge.

Hopefully other elements of society will follow this pattern. We can then anticipate a gradual improvement in the standard of performance in the economy. This in turn will enhance the trend of strengthening our educational system and quality of life at the workplace.

As the United States continues its mounting transformation into an information-oriented society, the Labor Market Information program also will continue to flourish as it expands its horizons and plays an ever increasing role identifying workplace trends into the 21st century.

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Interstate Conference of Employment Security Agencies, Inc.
Suite 126
444 N. Capitol Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001

Executive Director
Emily DeRocco

Labor Market Information
and Research Director
Gary Crossley